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RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH IMMEDIATE 2424  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY IMMEDIATE 2055  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
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SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN FM DOWNER URGES IRANIAN FM MOTTAKI TO  
RELEASE UK DETAINEES

Classified By: Political Counselor James F. Cole for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) On April 3, Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade David J. Ritchie gave the DCM a readout of Foreign Minister Downer's March 29 telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki regarding the 15 British naval personnel seized by Iran.

12. (C) According to Ritchie, Downer called Mottaki at the request of UK FCO Minister of State Kim Howell. Downer opened the conversation by noting Australia's special interest in the incident arose because an Australian ship had been scheduled to replace the HMS Cornwall. He repeated the United Kingdom's strong denial that it had intruded or had intended to enter Iranian waters. It was essential for Iran to resolve this issue before it blew up to a dangerous level, Downer told him.

13. (C) Mottaki responded that this was no longer just a legal matter but had become a political matter. He insisted that the UK was well aware it had entered Iranian territory. If the United Kingdom could accept the truth of the matter, he told Downer, then the two sides could resolve the issue. Downer reiterated the UK believed its personnel were in Iraqi waters, and warned Mottaki again that the matter could get out of control in the absence of a solution, with the potential for enormous repercussions. He reminded the Iranian Foreign Minister that the 15 British detainees were ordinary sailors, not spies. If Iran was angry over the intrusion, it should protest the matter but release the sailors. Iran would find a big diplomatic coalition building if it did not do so.

14. (C) Mottaki maintained it was up to the United Kingdom to resolve the impasse. Downer countered that the Iranian response was not proportionate to the incident. If Australia were to encounter foreign nationals in its waters, he said, it would simply deport them, not drag them to Canberra to parade them before the TV cameras.

15. (C) Ritchie told me the tone of the conversation had been good. He said it was clear, however, that the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was out of the picture; the Revolutionary Guards and others were calling the shots. Ritchie added that he planned to summon the newly arrived Iranian envoy to Australia, Ambassador Mahmoud Movahhedi, to

convey a similar message on the need to release the detainees. Movahhedi, he added, was not from the Foreign Affairs Ministry but had been a senior assistant to Ali Akbar Velayati, Adviser on International Affairs to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

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